The Appraisal of Modern Records

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FOREWORD

Perhaps the most difficult problem facing an archivist concerned with modern public records is that of appraisal. In the case of the Federal archivist this problem is particularly acute because of the recency and the mass of the records with which he deals. To help solve this problem, the present bulletin has been written. In it the values of public records are discussed in relation to the evidence they contain on the organization and functioning of Government bodies and the information in them on persons, things, and phenomena that were the concern of such bodies. While the bulletin contains no exact standards by which the value of records may be judged, it suggests certain broad approaches that should be taken

in appraisal work.

The bulletin also contains convincing evidence that the evaluation of records is not a simple task. Appraisal judgments, it is clear, will be competent to the degree that the appraiser is well trained, has studied the organization, functions, and procedures of the agency whose records he is evaluating, and is familiar with the total research resources and needs of the field in which he is working.

Ever since the establishment of the National Archives 21 years ago, its professional staff has been appraising records. The results of that experience are reflected in the bulletin. As a part of our Records Management Program, we are now engaged in applying this experience to the management of current records and the improvement of paperwork generally throughout the Government. If properly carried out, this program should result not only in fewer and better records being created and maintained in the day-to-day business of Government, but in fewer and better records for future generations.

A recent report made by J. H. Collingridge of the British Public Record Office to the Third International Congress on Archives indicates that our professional colleagues abroad are also considering seriously the problems presented in appraising modern public records, and that their conclusions do not greatly differ from ours.

Dr. Schellenberg has been concerned with the problem of appraisal in various capacities in the National Archives. As Deputy Examiner he helped survey records of various Federal agencies to determine which of them were suitable for preservation; as Chief of the Division of Agriculture Department Archives he helped formulate procedures for scheduling records for disposal; and as Program Adviser he prepared a manual on the *Disposition of Federal Records.* He is now Director of Archival Management. During the Second World War he was Records Officer of the Office of Price Administration, and his experiences in selecting its records for preservation are reflected in this bulletin. He is author of *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques* (Melbourne and Chicago, 1956).

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INTRODUCTION

Modern public records are very voluminous. Their growth in volume corresponds closely to the increase in human population since the middle of the 18th century. This population increase has made necessary an expansion of governmental activity, and this expansion has had as one of its concomitants a tremendous increase in record production. As modern technological methods have come to be applied to the production of records, their growth, in the last several decades, has been in a geometric, rather than an arithmetic ratio.

A reduction in the quantity of such public records is essential to both the government and the scholar. A government cannot afford to keep all the records that are produced as a result of its multifarious activities. It cannot provide space to house them nor staff to care for them. The costs of maintaining them are beyond the means of the most opulent nation. Nor are scholars served by maintaining all of them. Scholars cannot find their way through the huge quantities of modern public records. The records must be reduced in quantity to make them useful for scholarly research. "Even the most convinced advocates of conservation in the historical interest," according to a pamphlet issued by the British Public Record Office, "have begun to fear that *the historian of the future dealing with our period* may be *submerged in the* flood *of written evidences."* (Footnote 1). The scholarly interest in records, for that matter, is often in inverse ratio to their quantity: the more records on a subject, the less is the interest.

In the reduction of modern public records great care must be exercised to retain those that have value. In the long run the effectiveness of a record reduction program must be judged according to the correctness of its determinations. In such a program there is no substitute for careful analytical work. Techniques cannot be devised that will reduce the work of deciding upon values to a mechanical operation. Nor is there a cheap and easy way to dispose of records unless it is one of destroying everything that has been created, of literally wiping everything off the board. Such a drastic course would appeal only to the nihilist, who sees no good in social institutions or in the records pertaining to them. The difficulties in appraising recent records are so great that it is small wonder some archivists were at one time inclined to shut their eyes to them and take no action at all. Like Louis XV before the French Revolution, they seemed to feel that "the old regime will

last our time, and after us the deluge."

DISTINCTION BETWEEN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY VALUES

The values that inhere in modern public records are of two kinds: primary values for the originating agency itself and secondary values for other agencies and private users. Public records are created to accomplish the purposes for which an agency has been created -- administrative, fiscal, legal, and operating. These uses are of course of first importance. But public records are preserved in an archival institution because they have values that will exist long after they cease to be of current use, and because their values will be for others than the current users. It is this lasting, secondary usefulness that will be considered in this bulletin.

DISTINCTION BETWEEN EVIDENTIAL AND INFORMATIONAL VALUES

The secondary values of public records can be ascertained most easily if they are considered in relation to two kinds of matters: (1) the evidence they contain of the organization and functioning of the Government body that produced them, and (2) the information they contain on persons, corporate bodies, things, problems, conditions, and the like, with which the Government body dealt. The distinction between the values that relate to these two kinds of matters may be clarified by analyzing the definition of records in the Records Disposal Act of the United States Government of July 7, 1943 (44 *U. S. Code* 366-80). In this act the word "records" is defined to include, first, all materials containing evidence of the "organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the Government." Here the emphasis is on the essential records of an agency's origin, development, and accomplishment -- the "evidential" records, which contain the evidence of the agency's existence and achievement. The word "records" is further defined in the act to include materials that should be preserved "because of the informational value of data contained therein." Here the emphasis is on records that contain essential information on matters with which an agency dealt, in contrast to records on the dealings themselves -- the "research" records, which contain information useful for studies in a variety of subject fields.

For purposes of discussion, the values that attach to records because of the evidence they contain of organization and function will be called "evidential values." By this term I do not refer to the value that inheres in public records because of any special quality or merit they have as documentary evidence. I do not refer, in the sense of the English archivist Sir Hilary Jenkinson, to the sanctity of the evidence in archives that is derived from "unbroken custody," (Footnote 2) or from the way they came into the hands of the archivist. I refer rather, and quite arbitrarily, to the value that depends on the character and importance of the matter evidenced, i.e. the origin and the substantive programs of the agency that produced the records. The quality of the evidence *per se* is thus not the issue here, but the character of the matter evidenced.

For purposes of discussion, also, the values that attach to records because of the information they contain will be referred to as "informational values." The information may relate, in a general way, either to persons, or things, or phenomena. The term "persons" may include either individuals or corporate bodies. The term "things" may include places, buildings, physical objects, and other material things. The term "phenomena" relates to what happens to either persons or things -- to conditions, problems, activities, programs, events, episodes, and the like.

It should be emphasized that the distinction between evidential and informational values is made solely for purposes of discussion. The two types of values are not mutually exclusive. A record may be useful for various reasons. The value that attaches to it because of its evidence of government organization and functioning may occasionally be the same as the value that is derived from its information on persons, things, and phenomena. A government's actions in the fields of diplomacy and war, for example, are the main objects of inquiry in regard to those fields. Here the evidential value coincides to a marked degree with the informational value, for the historian is as much interested in a government's actions in regard to diplomatic and military happenings as he is in the happenings themselves.

EVIDENTIAL VALUES

REASONS FOR TEST OF EVIDENTIAL VALUES

There are a number of reasons why we should consciously and deliberately apply the test of evidential value in the sense in which this term has been defined and why records having such value should be preserved regardless of whether there is an immediate or even a foreseeable specific use for them.

An accountable government should certainly preserve some minimum of evidence on how it was organized and how it functioned, in all its numerous and complex parts. All archivists assume that the minimum record to be kept is the record of organization and functioning and that beyond this minimum values become more debatable. By a judicious selection of various groups and series an archivist can capture in a relatively small body of records all significant facts on an agency's existence -- its patterns of action, its policies in dealing with all classes of matters, its procedures, its gross achievement.

Records containing such facts are indispensable to the government itself and to students of government. For the government they are a storehouse of administrative wisdom and experience. They are needed to give consistency and continuity to its actions. They contain precedents for policies, procedures, and the like, and can be used as a guide to public administrators in solving problems of the present that are similar to others dealt with in the past or, equally important, in avoiding past mistakes. They contain the proof of each agency's faithful stewardship of the responsibilities delegated to it and the accounting that every important public official owes to the people whom he serves. For students of public administration who wish to analyze the experiences of an agency in dealing with organizational, procedural, and policy matters, they provide the most reliable source of what actually was done.

The test of evidential value is a practical one. It involves an objective approach that the modern archivist is especially trained to take; for his training in historical methodology has taught him to look into the origin, development, and the working of human institutions and to use records for the purpose. The test is not easy, but it is definite. It will bring to view first the records on which judgments of value can be made with some degree of assurance, the degree depending upon the thoroughness with which the records have been analyzed. It can be applied by all archivists, for no archivist is likely to question that evidence of every agency's organization and functioning should be preserved. Differences of judgment will arise only as to the completeness with which such evidence should be preserved. The test of research value, on the other hand, brings to view records on which judgments are bound to differ widely.

The information obtained by an archivist in applying the test of evidential value will also serve to evaluate the significance of records from other points of view. The archivist must know how records came into being if he is to judge their value for any purpose. Public records, or, for that matter, records of any organic body, are the product of activity, and much of their meaning is dependent on their relation to the activity. If their source in an administrative unit of a government or in a particular activity is obscured, their identity and meaning are likely also to be obscured. In this respect they are unlike private manuscripts, which often have a meaning of their own without relation to their source or reference to other manuscripts in a collection.

In applying the test of evidential value the archivist is likely to preserve records that have other values as well -- records that are useful not only for the public administrator and the students of public administration, but also for the economist, sociologist, historian, and scholars generally.

EUROPEAN VIEWS ON EVIDENTIAL VALUES

Archivists of various countries have developed appraisal standards that require the preservation of records showing how public agencies were organized and conducted their business. German archivists, in particular, have been quite precise in this regard. (Footnote 3). In 1901 H. O. Meissner, head of the Prussian Privy State Archives, formulated a number of appraisal standards that have had a pronounced effect on the German archival profession. One of these is that files (in the sense of binders of documents brought together in registries) that relate to executive direction should be preserved for each organizational unit. Among the executive matters that Meissner recognized as worthy of record were the organization, direction, housing and business arrangements, and personnel of the unit. Another standard is that general files (those consisting of records on policy, procedure, and the like that have general applicability) should be preserved in the central organizational units where they originated -- that is, where they grew out of the functioning of an organizational unit -- and not at points where they were merely transmitted or received; and that the value of general files in subordinate organizational units should be determined by taking into account the activities of such units. A third standard is that records of intermediate organizational units should be preserved if they relate to the actual management of such units and not merely to their direction from above. A fourth standard is that special files of lower or subordinate organizational units should be preserved if they relate to the management of such units. And a fifth standard is that files of judicial bodies should be preserved if they relate to the substantive activities of such bodies or if they reflect the development of permanent rights and institutions, important historical episodes, political processes, or the customs and mores of past ages.

Shortly before the Second World War the Prussian Privy State Archives appointed a special commission to formulate appraisal standards. The commission was dissolved in 1940 before it succeeded in doing this, but its activities stimulated a

review of the appraisal problem by German archivists. At their meeting at Gotha, Meissner emphasized the importance of a correct archival approach in appraisal work, insisting that the old conception of appraisal as a matter of intuitive or fingertip feeling was completely discredited. His standards were endorsed by H. Meinert, who emphasized that appraisals should take into account the significance of the source of archives. This should be established by considering the position of each organizational unit in the government structure, the nature of its activities, and the relation of its activities to those of superior and subordinate organizational units. Records, Meinert held, cannot be reviewed singly as isolated pieces; they must be appraised in their administrative context.

British archivists also have emphasized the importance of preserving records on how organic bodies function. Their views on appraisal were first stated fully in a memorandum issued in 1943 by the British Records Association in connection with the wartime demand for paper salvage. In a pamphlet issued later by the Public Record Office the principles of appraisal contained in this memorandum were applied to public documents. This pamphlet, entitled "Principles governing the Elimination of Ephemeral or Unimportant Documents in Public or Private Archives," discussed the principles in relation to preserving records for business purposes and research purposes. (Footnote 4). For purposes of research the British would preserve records for three "historical or general uses": (1) to show the history of the organization concerned, (2) to answer technical questions regarding its operations, and (3) to meet possible scholarly needs for the information that is incidentally or accidentally contained in the records. The first two of these uses relate to "evidential values," the third to "informational values," in the sense in which these terms are used in this bulletin.

For the first, i.e. the history of the organization concerned, the British pamphlet favors preserving records that contain sufficient evidence to show *"what was the Business* or other form of organization whose activities they served--*how* it was conducted, *by whom,* and *with what results."* It indicates that the records containing this evidence are similar to those needed for the conduct of business. These include *"Minutes* and other Documents which give decisions on Policy; major series of *Accounts; Correspondence* leading to significant activity; *Muniments of Title* relating to Land and Property held by the person or organization concerned; and regularly kept *Registers* or *Memoranda* of Cases, Tests or Operations, Transactions put through or Operations carried out: roughly all the Documents reflecting policy and practice, past and present, which would enable someone else, if the present staff or practitioner were wiped out, to carry on or revive the business or work." For evidentiary purposes, the selection of records may be a bit more drastic than for business purposes, however. "Very often," according to the pamphlet, "all needs are served by preserving a few key documents and representative selections from regularly kept series and from large classes of constantly recurring documents of a routine character. *Specimens* should be selected for their representative character as illustrating the structure of the Business rather than for any adventitious interest . . ."

For the second use, that is, to answer technical questions regarding an organization's operations, the pamphlet would preserve evidence only for organizations that belong to "*a category of Institutions or Businesses whose Archives have rarely been preserved,"* that are themselves of *"outstanding importance"* in comparison with others in the same category, or that belong to "a category of Businesses etc. the general history and development of which are of outstanding importance and *can only* be *traced by the use of collective evidence."*

APPLYING THE TEST OF EVIDENTIAL VALUES

Thus far we have considered the thought of European archivists on the appraisal of public records from the point of view of their value in documenting the functioning of the bodies that produced them; let us now turn to the appraisal standards relating to the evidential values of the Federal records of the United States.

At the outset it is important to emphasize that appraisals of evidential values should be made on the basis of a knowledge of the entire documentation of an agency; they should not be made on a piecemeal basis. The archivist must know the significance of particular groups of records produced at various levels of organization in relation to major programs or functions. In many Federal agencies, offices at various organizational levels build up their own files, which are usually related to and often duplicate, in part at least, those of offices below or above. In the central organizations of such agencies departmental records may be related to bureau records, bureau records to divisional, and divisional to sectional. In field organizations records of regional offices may be related to those in State offices, and records of State offices to those in subordinate offices. The use of modern duplicating devices, moreover, may lead to an extensive proliferation of records in any particular office.

In reviewing the entire documentation of an agency, the archivist's decisions on which of its records he should preserve depends on a number of factors, the more important of which are embodied in the following questions:

1. Which organizational units in the central office of an agency have primary responsibility for making decisions regarding its organization, programs, policies, and procedures? Which organizational units carry on activities that are auxiliary to making such decisions? Which field officers have discretion in making such decisions? Which record series are essential to reflect such decisions?

2. To which functions of an agency do the records relate? Are they substantive functions? Which record series are essential to show how each substantive function was performed at each organizational level in both the central and field offices?

3. What supervisory and management activities are involved in administering a given function? What are the successive transactions in its execution? Which records pertain to the executive direction, as distinct from the execution of the function? To what extent are such records physically duplicated at various organizational levels? Which records summarize the successive transactions performed under the function? Which records should be preserved in exemplary form to show the work processes at the lower organizational levels?

While an archivist dealing with modern public records will have great difficulty in reducing them to manageable proportions, he will nonetheless often find that the records he wants were not produced at all. The records on important matters with which he is concerned are often not so complete as records on unimportant matters. It is a curious anomaly that the more important a matter, the less likely is a complete documentation of it to be found. While modern technology has aided the making and keeping of records in many ways, it has also made unnecessary the production of many documents that once would have become part of the record of Government action. Much that influences the development of policies and programs never makes its way into formal records. Important matters may be handled orally in conferences or by telephone, an instrument that has been referred to as the "great robber of history." (Footnote 5).

Records on important matters are often handled much less carefully while in current use than are records on unimportant matters. This lack of care is not intentional. Policy documents cannot always be identified as such when they are first created. Policies usually arise in respect to particular transactions, and so the records pertaining to them may be interfiled with others of no lasting moment on the transactions with which they were initially associated. Records on policy and procedural matters -- on general as distinct from specific matters -- are difficult to assemble, to organize into recognizable file units, and to identify in such a way that their significance will be apparent. Records of routine operations, on the other hand, are easily managed in a routine way.

The important policy documents are also difficult to schedule for retirement. Important records on policy and procedure do not become obsolete, or noncurrent, as soon as the transactions in connection with which they may have been made are completed. The policies and procedures they establish often continue in effect. And even if those policies and procedures are superseded, the records of them serve to explain and give meaning to the change. Such records are thus difficult to retire because the period of their administrative utility is difficult to establish. Records evidencing only the execution of policies and procedures, on the other hand, usually become noncurrent when action on the particular case has been completed. The termination of routine actions is usually definite and clear. Important records, moreover, are difficult to assemble for preservation in an archival institution because many of them must first be segregated from the mass of trivia in which they may have been submerged. And at the present time this segregation commonly has to be made after the records have lost their significance for current operations and their identity has become obscured, although more effective management of current records could greatly improve this situation over the years.

Let us now see more specifically what kinds of records should be preserved as evidence of organization and function.

Records on Origins

It is obvious that records on the origins of any governmental undertaking should be preserved. These may relate to problems or conditions that led to the establishment of a Government agency, such as a decline of agricultural prices, an increase of unemployment in the automotive industry, inequities in the regulation of interstate commerce, and the like. "Important problems," as quoted by the eminent Australian historian Dr. C. E. W. Bean from a circular sent to all departments by the Prime Minister, "are often met in their simplest form in the original stage of any undertaking. Often at that stage the object of the undertaking is most clear, and the difficulties most apparent. Records as to origin of action or organization have therefore peculiar value. Where, for example, a new Department has sprung from a branch of some other Department, and that branch itself has sprung from a Departmental Committee (or even from a public movement) which tried to grapple with the relevant problems when first they arose, the story of these initial efforts often contains the most important lesson for posterity." (Footnote 6). Records that relate to problems may be in the form of investigative

reports of the executive branch of the Federal Government, minutes of hearings before congressional committees, conference minutes, and memoranda and opinions of individuals. Records that relate to the actual establishment of a Government agency may consist of statutes and Executive orders as well as drafts and supporting material relating to legislative and executive action. Records that relate to its initial activities are likely to be quite scanty. In its early stages, a governmental agency normally consists only of a few persons who are concerned with planning its organizational structure and programs. Their plans may not be committed to writing at all, and, if written, may not be preserved. For at first documents -- often of the greatest significance to the early history of an agency -- are simply shoved into desk drawers, and only after the functions of the agency have become well defined are records kept systematically in files. The administrative orders and charts that initially define the structure and programs of an agency -- the early planning documents, however sketchy and perhaps inadequate in content -- should be carefully preserved.

Records on Substantive Programs

It is equally obvious that once an agency has been established some records should be preserved on its substantive programs. An example of how such records may be selected and reduced to manageable proportions -- to less than 1 percent of the total -- is found in the work of the Records Branch of the Office of Price Administration during the Second World War. This agency, as is apparent from its title, was concerned with the control of prices and the rationing of commodities during the war period. As a basis for establishing and fixing prices it had to gather economic data on various industries, and to obtain the observance of its regulations it had to engage in an enforcement program. Its four major programs thus related to Price Control, Rationing, Accounting, and Enforcement, each of which was handled by a major organizational unit. In preserving records on these programs, the Records Branch of the agency selected certain kinds of records on each program at all administrative levels -- national, regional, district, and local -- which in their entirety contained information on every aspect of its direction and execution.

Often *summary narrative accounts* exist of the direction and execution of an agency's programs. These accounts may be in the form of (1) annual or other periodic reports on accomplishments or (2) agency histories. Periodic reports, which are produced by most Government agencies, are an important but an inadequate record of accomplishment. They are inadequate because they are usually very brief, touching on just the highlights of an agency's work, and because they are usually uncritical, providing little information that is unfavorable to the agency.

Agency histories, which are often produced in relation to war emergency activities, are also inadequate as a record of an agency's work, though they constitute a very valuable supplement to its official documentation. In an article in *The Library Quarterly* of January 1946, Dr. W. J. Wilson, an historian in the Office of Price Administration, drew an interesting analogy between summarizations of statistical data and summarizations of records of administration and operation. He found that most of the statistical data accumulated by his agency, as well as by the War Production Board, during the Second World War could be summarized in tabulations and enumerations. He stated that "unless the masses of economic data [existing in innumerable administrative and statistical forms] are summarized statistically, they are almost useless for scientific work." Similarly he thought that "unless the masses of administrative and operating files are summarized in intelligible narratives, they are almost useless for historical work." He concluded, on the basis of this analogy, which he admitted was imperfect, that such files may be destroyed (1) "if the important historical information [in them] has been extracted and has been satisfactorily presented in narrative form . . . except perhaps for certain samples or certain illustrative documents of outstanding significance," (2) if "no historical narrative is likely ever to be based on them" because of their defective or confused condition, or (3) if they are not likely to be "used rather promptly for historical purposes." But this statement goes too far. Administrative history, just as any other kind of history, cannot be written definitively or objectively. No matter how well-conceived and well-executed an historical program may be, it cannot produce histories that will serve as a substitute for the original records. Official interpretations of records may be influenced by many factors -- the bias of the writer (which is usually an important element in the writing of official history), the competency of the writer in historical synthesis, the immediacy of the writing to the matter written about, and the like. The archivist's function is to preserve the evidence on which reinterpretations can be based, not merely to preserve current official interpretations of evidence; and to preserve this evidence impartially, without bias of any sort, and as fully as public resources will permit.

Policy documents, just as the summary reports of accomplishment, should be singled out for special attention in a record retention program. The term "policy documents," in the narrow sense of its meaning, relates to the special issuances that serve to communicate staff policies and procedures to the various line offices of an agency. No rigid distinction can be made between "policy" and "procedure." In general, policies are guiding principles that indicate the course of action to be followed in various kinds of transactions while procedures give detailed instructions on the specific methods and steps to

be followed in carrying out policies. The policies and procedures may relate to matters of varying degrees of importance. Regulations, for example, are of a permanent nature; other materials of an informational character such as notices are usually of a temporary or, at most, of a semipermanent nature. The directives that embody policies and procedures may he issued in various series, according to the degree of their importance, or according to the type of function to which they relate, i.e. facilitative or substantive. They may also be issued in various forms. Directives of a permanent nature are issued in the form of manuals or handbooks; while those of a temporary or semipermanent nature from the operating standpoint, intended to be periodically superseded, are normally issued in looseleaf series. Sets of all issuances should be preserved for archival purposes. They should normally be obtained at the organizational level at which they were created. They should include issuances that have been superseded as well as those currently in effect. They may include a master set of the forms developed for each of the procedures followed. Because of careless handling of records in temporary agencies it is often quite necessary to designate specific sets of serial issuances as record sets, a procedure that is important also in regular Government agencies. These record sets may include procedural, policy, organizational, and reportorial documents. Such documents are often reproduced in innumerable copies and are liberally broadcast throughout various offices. Unless a conscious attempt is made to develop record sets, stich documents often are neither accumulated nor preserved systematically.

The term "policy document" in the broadest sense of its meaning may include many papers that relate to the courses of action followed in an agency. It may include, in addition to the series of policy and procedural issuances, all kinds of records -- correspondence, minutes of conferences, staff studies, accomplishment and special reports, legal opinions and interpretations, organizational and functional charts, memoranda defining or delegating powers and responsibilities, and the like. It may include, in a word, any paper that shows the reasons why programs came into being, as well as papers that show how the programs were administered and executed.

Policy records, in the broad sense of the term, should not be regarded as a separate class of documents. No attempt should be made to bring them together into a separate collection. During the Second World War a program was developed to create a "policy documentation file" for one of the war agencies. It was planned to select policy documents (in the broad sense of the term) and to incorporate them into a separate file organized according to the Dewey-decimal system. The criteria of selection were not sufficiently well defined, nor could they have been, for they could not be made broad enough to capture all significant documents, and if they had been made broad enough they would have been largely meaningless. As a rule when individual documents are arbitrarily torn from their context, namely from the files of the organizational units that created them, they lose much of their meaning as a record of organization and function. If records are to serve as evidence of organization and function, the arrangement given them by the organizational units that created them should be maintained: and they should not be reorganized on a subject or other basis.

The records, then, that are encompassed in the term "policy documents" should be preserved so that they reflect the day-to-day work of policy-making and policy-execution in the organizational unit that produced them. They should be selected office by office in such a way that the various groups that are preserved will show how an agency was organized and how it carried out its functions. In appraising the evidential values of public records an archivist must be particularly conscious of organization, for these values largely depend on the position of the office that produced them in the administrative hierarchy of the agency. In general, the records of offices decrease in value as one descends the administrative ladder of an agency.

Most of the significant documentation of an agency's origins and programs is found in the files of "top management." These should be preserved virtually intact for the heads of executive departments and independent agencies, though they should be purged of records on house-keeping matters. Often such files should be preserved for the senior administrative officers just underneath the agency heads, such as the chiefs of bureaus, or the chiefs of organizational units that are the equivalent of bureaus, such as services and administrations in the central organization and regional and State offices in the field organization. Records of executive direction are often embodied in bureau central files. If such records are to be preserved it may be necessary to keep large quantities of rather unimportant records along with them. If records are properly classified while they are in current use this is not necessary.

The extent to which one should go down the administrative ladder to capture the significant documentation varies from agency to agency, and is generally determined by the extent to which the activities of its organizational units are disparate in character or its administrative responsibilities are decentralized. In an executive department like Commerce, for example, the various bureaus concern themselves with such matters as weather, foreign and domestic commerce, standards, and coast and geodetic surveys. These disparate matters cannot be handled centrally except in a most general way. The important records on the programs, plans, policies, and the like are thus obviously created at the bureau level.

The extent to which the records of any particular officer should be preserved depends on whether he has substance rather than a mere semblance of authority, whether he actually plans and directs and administers the work of his organizational unit or is merely the communicating agent for directions from above. The records of key officers may include their correspondence files, minutes of conferences and staff meetings, official diaries (if any were kept), memoranda, directives, and various other evidences of official action.

Attached to the offices of most heads of Government agencies are a number of organizational units that are engaged in research and investigation incidental to the formulation of plans, policies, or procedures or that are engaged in handling legal problems, budgetary matters, public relations, or internal management. *Research and investigative* records are of undoubted importance, for they often contain the rationale of Government programs -- the reasons why they came into being and were handled as they were. They may include staff studies and special reports which analyze workloads and performance or develop plans, policies, or procedures. Even background working papers of research and investigative offices may have value and should be examined carefully. On *legal matters* the archivist should normally preserve the correspondence files of the chief legal officer, opinions and interpretations, memoranda of law, delegations of authority, and other documents providing background information on the legal decisions of the agency. On budget matters the archivist should normally preserve copies of the budgets submitted to the Bureau of the Budget and the House of Representatives, and related papers such as estimates of requirements and justifications.

Public relations officers are concerned chiefly with publications, which they often merely distribute, and publicity materials, which they usually create themselves. The form of such materials is not the determining factor in considering their suitability for retention in an archival institution, for books are included among the documentary materials that fall within the definition of the term "archives." Publications produced in the performance of substantive functions should, as a rule, be preserved in libraries rather than in an archival institution. This is the case with respect to bulletins, pamphlets, circulars, and other issuances produced by agencies engaged in scientific, statistical, or research activities. There are, however, exceptions to this rule. Record sets of administrative publications created by an agency that are basic to an understanding of its functioning or organization, and publications accumulated by an agency that are basic to its own policy formulation should be retained in an archival institution. Publications embodied in records relating to their creation may also be considered eligible, particularly if the records contain successive drafts of important publications that reflect substantial changes in content.

Publicity materials produced in connection with informational and promotional activities should be preserved in an archival institution rather than in libraries. They provide the main documentation of programs that some agencies must undertake to interpret their actions to the public. Publicity materials may be in the form of press and radio releases, bulletins, pamphlets, charts, posters, and the like. They are often produced in large quantities but usually disappear almost as rapidly as they are created, for they are often considered as not falling within the definition of "records." The problem with respect to such materials is that of obtaining master files of each of the items from which all duplicate copies have been eliminated. The files should be obtained at the organizational level at which they were created. Press clippings should be retained if they are necessary to record informational activities or substantive functions of an agency on which other documentary materials are inadequate, and if they are organized in such a way as to be usable. The origin of the press clippings must also be taken into account. Nonsyndicated press clippings of specialized or small newspapers or journals should be given preference over those taken from metropolitan newspapers that are readily available at the Library of Congress.

On *internal management* or "housekeeping" activities, such as those relating to personnel, property, supply, and travel, relatively few records need be saved for archival purposes. In evaluating certain types of such records account must be taken of the retention of related records by the General Accounting Office, the Treasury Department, and the Civil Service Commission. The value of accounting records of particular offices for a study of Federal accounting practices, for example, is affected by the work of the General Accounting Office since 1921 in progressively standardizing Government accounting systems. Before that time the records on such practices are found in the several agencies and in the commissions that investigated contemporary practices; after that time, in the files of the General Accounting Office. The value of records of particular personnel offices, similarly, is affected by the progressive standardization of personnel procedures in recent years by the Civil Service Commission. Central records on recruitment, training, promotion, retirement, and the like, are therefore adequate; records of agencies pertaining to the administration of personnel matters should be preserved only to the extent that they reflect special or distinctive activities. The procedures that are followed in handling property and supply matters are also performed pretty much the same way in all agencies, and records pertaining to them usually do not contain much evidence essential to an understanding of the functioning of a particular agency. As a rule, then, records pertaining to internal management activities that are distinctive, that deviate from the normal pattern, or

that pertain to problems peculiar to an agency should be preserved; those pertaining to normal internal management activities should not.

Records pertaining to the *execution of Government programs* are difficult to manage from an archival point of view. These records not only have the greatest bulk; they present also the most serious problems of evaluation. The dividing line between the executive direction and the execution of Government programs is not a very sharp one. Records that evidence genuinely significant matters relating to either direction or execution have permanent value.

While a clear-cut distinction cannot be made between records relating to the detailed execution of an agency's programs and those relating to their overall direction, a difference between the two is perceptible. In a typical Government program a number of interrelated activities occur which normally relate to more detailed matters as one descends the administrative ladder. At its bottom these activities relate to the dealings of the Government with specific persons, things, or phenomena. At its top they relate to administration and policy which are reflected in summary reports of accomplishment and more general documents pertaining to such matters. Usually the evidence on an agency's program is adequate that is provided in the form of (1) summaries (statistical or narrative) of the transactions of a specific kind, (2) a selection of records on particularly significant transactions, and (3) a selection of records on transactions that are representative of all or most of the transactions of a specific kind.

The extent of documentation required on the specific transactions of an agency depends on the adequacy of its reporting system. Under an effective system, performance will be recorded in narrative and statistical reports for administrative purposes -- to evaluate progress, to formulate or revise policies and procedures, and the like. Such reports often serve as an adequate substitute for vast quantities of detailed records on routine operations. Occasionally they may take the form of histories of activities, such as the histories of the local boards of the Office of Price Administration during the Second World War. In most agencies, even badly managed ones, the patterns of activity and the accomplishments at lower administrative levels will as a rule be adequately reflected in a limited quantity of selected documents of one kind or another. Usually such activities are conducted in accordance with orders, regulations, manuals of procedure, and other directives issuing from superior offices.

In a National Archives *Staff Information Paper* on "The Appraisal of Current and Recent Records," Dr. G. Philip Bauer observed that "significant variations of policy, methods, or procedure and notable occurrences usually manage to get themselves relayed upward through reports, correspondence, and complaints, or else fail to get into the records of the subordinate office."

Occasionally the summary records may have to be supplemented by records of particular actions that have special significance for an agency's history. On the enforcement of price, rationing, and rent regulations of the Office of Price Administration, for example, a limited number of case files were selected for retention (1) to illustrate the application of various sanctions, both judicial and administrative, at Federal, State, and local levels; (2) to illustrate the more interesting points of law in the enforcement of such sanctions; and (3) to document outstanding events in the agency's litigatory history. One of the criteria for the selection of the case files was thus the significance of the actions to which they pertained. The initial actions taken in new agencies or new programs may also be deserving of fairly complete documentation, even at the grassroots level of operations. Similarly, actions that represent significant deviations from the norm, if not recorded at the policy level, should be reflected in records preserved in sample as evidence of policy and procedure.

Occasionally, also, the summary records may have to be supplemented by a selection of records that illustrate the pattern or norm of action. Here the emphasis is not on the unusual or significant but on the usual or normal. Actions at the lower organizational levels may be illustrated by retaining either all records of particular offices or particular records of such offices. During the Second World War, a limited number of local price and rationing hoards of the Office of Price Administration were designated as "record boards," the records of which were preserved in their entirety to illustrate how various problems were handled at the local board level. This documentation of local hoard activities is supplemented by the histories, which have already been mentioned, and by particular classes of administrative records selected from various boards; it is probably in excess of what is needed. "Even the records of a single field office preserved to exemplify the administrative processes at the lower levels," Bauer states in his paper, "are likely to prove a disappointment when they are closely examined in relation to headquarters records." Usually it is not necessary to preserve all records of particular offices; usually a few groups or series of records taken from one or more offices contain all the evidence that is needed of the norm or pattern. A few case files on how labor adjudication cases were conducted, for example, are adequate as a record of the procedures that were followed. Usually if there is any enduring interest in the individual acts of an agency it

is because of the nature of these acts rather than the governmental process involved.

INFORMATIONAL VALUES

Informational values derive, as is evident from the very term, from the information that is in public records on the matters with which public agencies deal; not from the information that is in such records on the public agencies themselves. The greater proportion of modern public records preserved in an archival institution are valued less for the evidence they contain of Government action than for the information they contain about particular persons, situations, events, conditions, problems, materials, and properties in relation to which the question of action comes up. Most of the larger series of records in the National Archives, for example, were accessioned primarily for the information they contain relating to other matters than the action of the Government itself. Among such series are the voluminous census schedules, military service records, pension files, passenger lists, land-entry papers, and various kinds of case files. In most instances such series shed light on the activity of Government agencies, but so little in proportion to their bulk that this is not an important factor in their selection for preservation; it is presumed that other records show the activity of the agencies more effectively.

TESTS OF INFORMATIONAL VALUES

In appraising the value of information in public records, the archivist is not greatly concerned with the source of the records -- what agency created them, or what activities resulted in their creation. The concern here is with the information that is in them. There are a number of tests by which informational values of public records may be judged. These are (1) uniqueness, (2) form, and (3) importance.

Uniqueness

The test of uniqueness must be carefully defined if it is to be meaningful. In applying the test the archivist must consider both (1) the uniqueness of the information, and (2) the uniqueness of the records that contain the information.

The term "uniqueness," as applied to information, means that the information contained in particular public records is not to be found in other documentary sources in as complete and as usable a form. Information is obviously unique if it cannot be found elsewhere. But information in public records is seldom completely unique, for generally such records relate to matters that are also dealt with in other documentary sources, and the information they contain may be similar or approximately similar to that contained in the other sources. To be regarded as unique for appraisal purposes the information need not be completely dissimilar from all other information. But it should pertain to matters on which other documentary information does not exist as fully or as conveniently as in public records.

In applying the test of uniqueness to information in records, an archivist must bring into review all other sources of information on the matter under consideration. These sources encompass materials produced outside as well as within the Government. The materials produced outside may be published or unpublished: they may consist of private manuscripts, newspapers, books, nearprint materials, or any other form of documentation. The Government materials are the various record series relating to the matter under consideration. The archivist must understand the relation of such series to each other and must be able to identify the particular series that should be preserved. To determine if a body of records is the sole adequate source of information on a given matter, he needs to be a real expert in the subject -- acquainted with all outside resources and the products of research as well as with the other records of the Government dealing with the subject in question. The Federal archivist should know of all the significant documentation that relates to his field of specialization; the State archivist should ordinarily know of all the significant documentation relating to the history of his State.

In applying the test of uniqueness to the form of the records rather than to the information contained in them, the matter to be considered by the archivist is the physical duplication of the public records. In the Federal Government of the United States, as is well known, there is a great and perhaps an unnecessary proliferation of records. Not only are records duplicated from one administrative level to another, but within a given Government office several copies of a particular record may exist. While records having informational values are not likely to be found in as many forms or as many series as are records having evidential values, it is nonetheless necessary to carefully compare records containing information on any particular matter to avoid retaining more than one copy of them. To illustrate: records containing economic data filed by various business firms with the Office of Price Administration to obtain price adjustments were physically duplicated,

to a certain extent at least, in the regional and national offices, and within the national office in the Enforcement and Price Departments of the agency. A collation of the price adjustment records was necessary to avoid keeping duplicate copies.

Because of the greater technical difficulties our ancestors faced in publishing or duplicating information and because of the inevitable loss of many records through the centuries before archival care became general, records of the remote past are likely to be the only remaining source of information on many matters with which they deal. This fact led the German archivist Meissner to formulate a maxim that "old age is to be respected" (Footnote 7) in records. Archivists of various countries have set chronological date lines before which they propose that all records shall be kept. In Germany the date is 1700, in England 1750, in France 1830, and in Italy 1861. The Italian date corresponds fairly closely, by historical coincidence, to that adopted by the National Archives of the United States, where almost all surviving records created before the Civil War, which began in 1861, are being preserved.

While public records are likely to be more valuable as a source of information when other kinds of documentary materials are scanty, the converse of this statement is also true. The proportion of public records requiring permanent retention diminishes as other kinds of documentary materials increase in quantity. It is doubtful if governments are justified, in the face of other forms of recent documentation, in keeping more than a small proportion of the voluminous contemporary public records. But an archivist's job of appraisal increases in difficulty as the documentation of society increases in quantity. He must apply standards of selection with constantly greater discrimination as he deals with more recent records; in particular, he must apply the test of uniqueness to them with great severity. For "of the making of many books" -- and of many other types of documentary materials -- "there is no end," to paraphrase the Preacher.

Form

In applying the test of form the archivist, again, must consider both (1) the form of the information in records and (2) the form of the records.

As applied to information, the term "form" relates mainly to the degree to which the information is concentrated. Information may be concentrated in records in the sense that (1) a few facts are presented in a given record about many persons, things, or phenomena, or (2) many facts are presented about a few persons, things, or phenomena, or (3) many facts are presented about diverse matters -- persons, things, and phenomena. In the first case, the information may be said to be extensive, in the second intensive, and in the third diversified. Census schedules and passenger lists, for example, provide extensive information in the sense that each schedule or list pertains to many persons. Case files of various labor boards and other adjudicative, investigative, or regulatory bodies serve as examples of records containing intensive information about a limited number of particular matters. Reports of county agents of the Agricultural Extension Service and of the consular and diplomatic agents of the State Department serve as examples of records containing information about diverse matters. In their pamphlet the British archivists expressed their ideas about the concentration of record information in their criterion that business records should be preserved which "affect, name, or touch by inference a *large number of persons and/or things or topics,"* and particularly "if both persons and things are involved in quantities." In general, records that represent concentrations of information are the most suitable for archival preservation, for archival institutions are almost always pressed for space to house records.

The term "form" as applied to the records rather than to the information contained in them relates to the physical condition of the public records. Physical condition is important, for if records are to be preserved in an archival institution, they should be in a form that will enable others than those who created them to use them without difficulty and without resort to expensive mechanical or electronic equipment. Chemistry notebooks, for example, are not likely to be intelligible to others than the chemists who recorded the results of their experiments in them; while punchcards and tape recordings are commonly unusable without resort to expensive equipment.

Arrangement is also important. Certain record series may be preserved by the archivist simply because they are arranged in a particularly usable manner. If he has a choice among several series relating to a given matter, he will choose for preservation the series whose arrangement most facilitates the extracting of information. For example, reports of American agricultural agents and attache's, though duplicated in the files of the State Department, are being preserved as a separate series accumulated by the Foreign Agricultural Service of the Department of Agriculture because their arrangement makes it easier to use them than the copies of the reports embodied in the classified filing system of the State Department.

Importance

In applying the test of importance, the archivist is in the realm of the imponderable, for who can say definitely if a given body of records is important, and for what purpose, and to whom? An archivist assumes that his first obligation is to preserve records containing information that will satisfy the needs of the Government itself, and after that, however undefinable these needs may be, private scholars and the public generally.

He should take into account the actual research methods of various classes of persons and the likelihood that they would under ordinary circumstances make effective use of archival materials. He will normally give priority to the needs of the historian and the other social scientists, but he obviously must also preserve records of vital interest to the genealogist, the student of local history, and the antiquarian. He should not, however, preserve records for very unlikely users, such as persons in highly specialized technical and scientific fields, who do not use records extensively in the normal exercise of their professions and are not likely to use archival materials relating to them.

Public records may have a collective, as well as an individual significance. Research values are usually derived from the importance of information in aggregates of records, not from information in single items. Records are collectively significant if the information they contain is useful for studies of social, economic, political, or other phenomena, as distinct from the phenomena relating to individual persons or things. Records of the General Land Office, for example, collectively show how the public domain passed into private hands and how the West was settled; individually, the land-entry papers also have value for biographical studies and for studies of family history. In his article on "The Selection of Records for Preservation" in *The American Archivist* for October 1940, Dr. Philip C. Brooks has correctly observed that ". . . most records having historical value possess it not as individual documents but as groups which, considered together, reflect the activities of some organization or person or portray everyday, rather than unique, events and conditions."

Records relating to persons and things may, of course, have an individual research value in relation to particular persons or things. Normally, the more important the person or thing, the more important is the record relating to it. Such records may also have sentimental values because of their association with heroes, dramatic episodes, or places where significant events took place. Usually such values are attached to single record items, such as the Emancipation Proclamation, though extreme sentimentalists sometimes attach them to all records relating to the objects of their reverence, no matter how voluminous or trifling they may be. Utility for determining significant facts is with such persons only a secondary consideration. But archivists must exercise their sense of proportion in judging sentimental value.

Before applying the test of importance, an archivist should be sure that records meet the tests of uniqueness and form. The test of importance relates, as has been noted, to imponderable matters -- to matters that cannot be appraised with real certainty. The tests of uniqueness and form, in contrast, relate to ponderables -- to matters that are capable of being appraised on the basis of ascertainable facts.

An archivist normally brings to his task a general knowledge of the resources and products of research, which he acquired during his academic training. In the discharge of his duties he normally acquires a specialized knowledge of subject-matter fields pertinent to the records with which he works. And while performing reference service he learns to know of genuine research needs. He will also acquire a knowledge of the documentation produced by the agencies with which he deals so that he can reduce to manageable proportions the quantity of records that must be used for research. But if he does not have such knowledge, he should deliberately seek it by searching out and comparing the documentation available on various matters; and if his investigation fails to yield an answer he should not hesitate to consult subject-matter specialists.

APPLYING TESTS OF INFORMATIONAL VALUES

Let us now see how the tests of uniqueness, form, and importance have been applied to groups of records in the National Archives containing information on (1) persons, (2) things, or (3) phenomena. In discussing information relating to these three matters it is not assumed that records relate exclusively to one or the other of them; they may, and often do, relate to more than one of them.

Records Relating to Persons

The term "persons," it will be recalled, was defined to include both individuals and corporate bodies. The values of records relating to persons will be discussed with reference to the information they contain on the persons themselves, not with reference to their information on the conditions, problems, situations, and the like, that affect the persons.

Records relating to persons are produced in great quantities by modern governments. Certain types of records, like census schedules, are intended to cover all human beings in a country; others, relating to specific classes, often represent large

segments of the population, such as laborers, farmers, soldiers, and recipients of social welfare services; still others relate to even more specialized classes, such as transient Mexican or Puerto Rican laborers, Indians, and other nationality groups. As the controls of the Government over its individual citizens are extended, more records are created in relation to them. With universal military service, for example, records are created on the entire male population of a certain age group which may duplicate, in part at least, the information contained in census schedules. Records on a given soldier, again, may be created in relation to various phases of his military life -- his service in the armed forces, his medical history, his retirement and pensioning. And these records, in turn, may be supplemented by records on his life as a civilian, such as on the taxation of his property, his relation to governmental welfare programs, the control of his business if it is of the type that is subject to Government regulation, and various other of his activities that may bring him in touch with his Government. Social welfare activities, in particular, result in the production of voluminous records pertaining to poverty and dependency, crime and delinquency, disease and sanitary problems, and the like.

The problem of deciding which records on human beings to keep is a particularly difficult one. The records obviously are very great in quantity and duplicative in content. The information in them about persons is largely impersonal in character, particularly in recent years as the relations of the Government with its citizens have become more formal and impersonal. The information about any particular person, moreover, is not extensive, and often consists of nothing more than the bareboned facts necessary to establish his identity. The records contain few of the intimate details that are found in diaries or personal correspondence.

If considered singly and solely with reference to the personal information they contain, most records pertaining to persons have relatively little research value. From the point of view of their significance for demographic, sociological, or economic studies, they are usually important only in the aggregate. For such studies they have value only if used collectively and because of their information on phenomena that concern a number of persons, and not because of their information on single persons. And summarizations of the data they contain are usually available in statistical enumerations and tabulations, either in published or unpublished form. From the point of view of their historical or biographical significance, they are important individually only to the degree that the persons to whom they pertain are important. An archivist obviously will preserve all records, whatever their character, for notable persons who lived in the past; but how is he to know who will become notable among the millions about whom records are now being created?

Among the large series of records in the National Archives that pertain to persons are records of the censuses of population. These serve to illustrate most of the problems that arise in the appraisal of personal records.

Since the original schedules are very voluminous, an archivist is justified in questioning, momentarily at least, if printed statistical summarizations of their contents will not adequately meet scholarly needs. A goodly proportion of the general information in the schedules is available in published final reports. The *Statistical Abstract of the United States,* which is issued periodically by the Bureau *of* the Census, also contains a wealth of statistical data. It is supplemented by *Historical Statistics of the United States, 1789-1945,* published by the Bureau in 1949; and a supplement to this was issued in 1954. The statistical publications of the Bureau are so numerous that a sizable book is required to list them -- the *Catalog of United States Census Publications, 1790-1945,* published by the Bureau in 1950.

The unpublished social data produced by the Bureau, however, are also quite valuable, according to C. Luther Fry, who some years ago wrote an article on "Making Use of Census Data," published in the *Journal of the American Statistical Association* for June 1930. Fry points out that the data on population contained in unpublished enumerations and tabulations of recent years are classified according to sex, color or race, nativity, and parentage; that they show various social phenomena, such as the rural population by counties, the marital status of classes of population, and facts concerning the tenure of homes; and that generally they are more adaptable to the purposes of research than the published statistics because they are broken down by smaller localities.

The original schedules of the censuses of population from 1790 to 1880 are, nevertheless, preserved in the National Archives, which is one of the few large archival institutions in the world that preserves this type of record. While the published and unpublished statistical summarizations are likely to contain most of the information needed by the scholar, such summarizations are occasionally found to be inadequate. This is the case, for example, for studies of the settlement or the movement of nationality groups that can be identified only by noting the names of individuals. Here the original schedules must be used. The schedules are used occasionally, also, by scholars wishing to obtain or verify basic facts about persons in historical or biographical studies. They are used most extensively, however, for genealogical searches and for establishing facts about persons that are ordinarily derived from vital records when such records are available. To a degree, then, population census schedules meet the tests of uniqueness and importance.

The information on the population of the United States that is provided in the census schedules is comprehensive both as to time and place. The schedules provide almost complete coverage of the population of the country at intervals of ten years, and they represent concentrations of information about individuals, containing many facts about persons in relatively small compass (though the later census schedules are so voluminous that they have been reduced to microfilm). Beginning with the census of 1850 the schedules usually show the name and age and the State, territory, or country of birth of every free inhabitant in the United States. While census schedules vary in their content from one country to another, and within a country from one census to the next, they usually contain information in regard to the personal characteristics (family, sex, marital status, age), the political status (birthplace, nationality, language, race), the social status (literacy, religion), and the economic status (occupation, earnings) of individual citizens. Because of their arrangement and the concentrated form of their information, census schedules also meet the test of form.

There are numerous other groups of records in the National Archives that contain personal data on individuals. Some of these are valuable because of the individual information they contain. Examples are homestead applications, passport applications, pension applications, passenger lists, old personnel records (both military and civilian), and immigration and naturalization records. Others, although again containing information on individuals, are not valued for that reason, but rather because they deal with a class of persons. Examples are the case files on farmers participating in the Agricultural Adjustment Administration and the rural rehabilitation programs during the economic depression of the 1930's, southern sharecroppers, migrant workers, transient Mexican and Puerto Rican laborers, Indians, criminals, and others. Here records have value because of their information on a class of persons, not because of their information on specific persons. On such classes the information is not exclusively or even primarily of a personal nature; it may relate to economic, geographic, or other phenomena. This brings us away from personal values to values for studies of phenomena; these will be discussed in later paragraphs in which records on various types of phenomena will be considered.

In selecting records for the information they contain about persons, two alternative courses are possible. The first is to select those that represent concentrations of information, such as census schedules, in which single documents provide extensive, intensive, or diversified information in a concentrated form. The second is to select a limited number of documents or case folders that are representative or illustrative of the whole, or that are adequate to throw light on the phenomena under investigation.

In the latter of the alternatives, namely that of selecting for retention a limited number of case files on individuals, two principles may be followed: (1) that of special selection, and (2) that of statistical sampling. The principle of special selection may be illustrated by the retention in the National Archives of a limited number of personnel folders for civilian Federal employees. For the early years such folders are replete with documents of an informative nature and are being retained. For the later years only those for key employees who served the Government in an administrative, executive, or supervisory capacity are selected for retention. Here the persons are individually important so that a selection is made in relation to individuals rather than to matters of a social nature. The principle of special selection may also be applied to obtain a documentation of social or other phenomena. The principle of statistical sampling is applied only when records are being selected for studies of collective, not individual phenomena. Such applications will be discussed in later paragraphs in which records on various types of phenomena will be considered.

Before closing the discussion of records containing information about persons, a little more attention should be given to the matter of the personal uses of such records. The uses that are to be considered here are those that relate to financial, legal, or civil rights of individuals. To what extent, in a word, is an archival institution obligated to preserve records for purely personal uses?

Public records are the ultimate proof of all permanent civic rights and privileges; and the immediate proof of all temporary property and financial rights that are derived from or are connected with the citizen's relations to the Government. Certain of the property and financial rights are of long duration; others are of a passing nature.

Among the most important records relating to persons are those that establish the facts of their existence, identity, and marital status. These facts are essential in establishing a whole host of collateral rights, such as the rights to property, to the privileges of citizenship, and to social benefits of various kinds. The National Archives is preserving a number of large groups of records containing the vital facts about persons, and has compiled a list of them for those who seek information concerning age and citizenship. The census schedules, which have been considered at some length, are the most important group of such records, and are used extensively to establish facts about persons that are ordinarily derived from vital records when such are available. The Census Bureau itself has established an organizational unit devoted exclusively to providing such vital data from the schedules of the censuses of 1880, 1900, and 1920. Its services are similar to those

performed by registries of vital records.

In every advanced society, the state has provided for the maintenance of vital records of births, marriages, and deaths. The history of their maintenance is a long one. The formal registration of information about births, marriages, and deaths in the English-speaking world began in 1538 when Henry VIII required that the incumbents of parish churches throughout England enter in books a record of each baptism, marriage, and burial that occurred in the parish. This practice spread to other Christian countries so that by the 18th century legal registration of vital data by Protestant and Catholic officials was widespread. In 1789, during the French Revolution, the responsibility for handling French registrations was transferred from church officials to town halls throughout the country. In the next century other European countries followed the practice of France in making such registrations a state rather than a church responsibility. In England a registration law was enacted in 1836 that created a central register officer with responsibility for the records and statistics of births, marriages, and deaths -- by cause -- for all England and Wales. This act of 1836 was the prototype of registration laws for the British colonies, including those of Australia, and for certain of the American States, notably Massachusetts, which enacted the first registration law in America in 1842. In the middle of the 19th century a number of American States passed laws requiring that public records of births, marriages, and deaths be made and that copies of such records be sent to a central bureau of vital statistics in the capital city of the State. New Jersey began the practice in 1848, and Rhode Island and Virginia in 1853. Largely through the agitation of the American Public Health Association, founded in 1872, various other States adopted registration systems, so that by 1919 every State had a central registry of vital statistics. (Footnote 8).

Vital records pertaining to births, deaths, and marriages should be and are being permanently maintained by the respective States. The Federal Government in the future will therefore be relieved of any necessity to keep large bodies of records because they contain incidental information on births, marriages, and deaths, as it now does for earlier periods in our history.

Another important class of records relating to persons is that which establishes facts regarding property. Most such records relate to property rights of a purely temporary nature, such as arise out of contracts with the Government, loan agreements, and the like. These have a value only for the duration of the commitments between the Government and the persons involved. There are, however, certain property rights which, as the German archivist Meissner has pointed out, relate to substantial matters, such as titles to real property that was once owned by the state. In the National Archives this class of record is best exemplified by the records of the General Land Office that relate to the transfer to private persons of title to land on the public domain.

Another important class of records relating to persons is that which establishes facts regarding their service to the Government either in a military or a civilian capacity. These facts are also essential in establishing a number of collateral rights, such as rights to pensions and other benefits. The personnel records of Federal civil servants have been found to be very sketchy in recent years. They contain only the information necessary to establish the employee's rights, and they are therefore being retained (in the Federal Records Center in St. Louis, Mo.) only for the duration of such rights.

There are innumerable other classes of records that are important to persons in support of their "rights." The list is endless. They arise every time an individual has any sort of dealing with his Government. The extent to which, the duration for which, and the place at which the Government should preserve such records are matters of public policy. For records that relate to purely temporary relations between the citizen and his Government, the conclusions of Bauer in his paper are valid, viz. : first, that "an agency established to protect or regulate certain private interests ought, of course, to maintain appropriate records and preserve them as long as the interests primarily affected by them subsist," and secondly, that "a fair working principle for fixing the retention period of such records would be to consider them only in relation to those interests that fall within the jurisdiction of the agency creating or accumulating them and not in relation to all the limitless rights and interests that could be defended by their collateral use."

Besides the records that deal with persons individually there are numerous groups of records in the National Archives that contain data on corporate bodies. Such records are usually in the form of case files that pertain to the Government s relations with particular corporate bodies or in the form of returns (or reports) that are furnished to the Government by corporate bodies of a particular kind. Among the case files are those pertaining to cases of bankruptcy, equity, and law before district and claims courts; to labor disputes before various labor boards to the manufacture and marketing of foods and drugs; and to the regulation of interstate commerce, trade, transportation, and communications. Among the returns or reports are those submitted to the Bureau of Mines on sales, production, employment, and the like, by the mineral industries to the Commodity Exchange Administration on trading at the Chicago Board of Trade; to the Securities and

Exchange Commission on corporate bodies issuing securities; to the Federal Trade Commission; and to other regulatory and investigative agencies of the Federal Government. Usually such returns or reports are submitted to the Government in compliance with regulations or under subpoena powers provided by statute, and their use is restricted for relatively long periods of time. They are preserved for the information they contain about business and financial conditions generally, not for their information on particular firms.

There are exceptional instances, however, in which they are kept for a study of particular firms. This is the case with the records of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Company covering the years 1785 to 1939, which were acquired by the Government and which are obviously valuable for a study of business history, as well as for a study of internal improvements. If records are to be preserved on particular firms, the criteria for their selection suggested by the British archivists are as good as any. In their pamphlet on the principles of elimination the British archivists suggested, it will be recalled, that records should be preserved for firms that belong to a category for which records "have rarely been preserved," or that are of "outstanding importance" in comparison with others in the same category, or that belong to a category the general history and development of which "can only be traced by the use of collective evidence." Like most records on individuals, however, records on corporate bodies are preserved mainly for their collective significance; not for their value in studying the history of individual firms. In this respect they have value for studies of various economic and social phenomena, and will therefore be discussed in later paragraphs.

Records Relating to Things

The term "things," it will be recalled, was defined to include places, buildings, and other material objects. In discussing records on things the values to be considered are those that derive from the information they contain on the things themselves, not from the information on what happens to things.

Among the most fundamental things with which human beings are concerned is the land on which they live. The National Archives preserves many series of records relating to land: records on its mineral resources, produced by the Bureau of Mines; on the classification of its soils, produced by the Bureau of Soils; on its survey and exploration, produced by the Geological Survey; on the ownership of lands that were once part of the public domain, produced by the General Land Office; and on various other of its topographical, geological, and geographical features.

The records pertaining to lands that were once part of the public domain will serve to illustrate most of the problems of appraisal that arise in relation to records on things. These are the land-entry papers of the General Land Office, of which there are almost 19,000 cubic feet in the National Archives, and among which are many applications for homestead lands during the years 1862 to 1950. The land-entry papers contain descriptions of the land by subdivision, section, township, and range. Since the title to the land is based upon the documents transferring it from the public domain into private hands, the records are primarily retained for the evidence they contain of the legal or property rights of individuals who now have possession of the land. The records will have to be retained for this purpose so long as the present system of recording title to real property exists. If the Torrens system of land title registration were in use, the retention of the whole chain of records on conveyancing transactions going back to the original land-entry papers would be unnecessary. (Footnote 9). The land-entry papers of each applicant for a homestead on the public domain, as has been noted before, also contain personal information, such as his age, place of birth, and, where appropriate, information about his naturalization. They are, therefore, used quite extensively for genealogical purposes. While the land-entry papers, as a whole, can be used for studies of the settlement of the West, and for study of the alienation of public lands, they are seldom so used. Their information on the character of the lands themselves is insignificant. The papers, considering their volume and arrangement, hardly meet the test of form and barely meet the test of importance, but the primary values that still inhere in them are such that under the present conveyancing system of land titles no Government officer would venture to recommend their disposal.

Records in the National Archives relating more broadly to the land of this country include military and nonmilitary geographical explorations and surveys such as those of Lewis and Clark in 1803-6; geological surveys such as those of Hayden (1867-79), King (1867-80), Powell (1869-79), and Wheeler (1869-79); surveys of the public domain by the General Land Office; and boundary and railroad surveys. These records contain geographical, topographical, geological, botanical, and ethnographical information. This information is important; the sources in which it is presented are unique; and while the sources are widely scattered and, on occasion, have been removed from public custody, they nonetheless are quite workable and would be more so if they could be brought together.

Among other things on which records are being preserved in the National Archives are manmade things -- things that, by

and large, are impermanent and the records of which, therefore, are less likely to have enduring value. Among such records are those relating to the internal improvements of the nation, such as the records of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Company which have already been mentioned, of railroads on which records are found in a number of record groups, and of buildings. The records on buildings may serve to illustrate problems of appraising records relating to artificial things. It is obvious that records need not be kept on most buildings, whether private or public, that they need not even be kept, for instance, on their architectural or structural details, for printed information is available on such matters. Records on buildings are archivally important only if the buildings themselves are important; and buildings acquire an importance because of the associations with them, because they are identified with important historical personages or important historical events, or because they are outstanding examples of period buildings. The homes of our Presidents -- Mount Vernon, Monticello, The Hermitage and the buildings in which important historical events occurred -- Independence Hall, the White House, the Capitol -- these are important for their associations and practically all records pertaining to them are therefore important. In evaluating records on such structures the dictum for records of the last century should be to "keep everything." For records of quite recent origin, however, everything obviously cannot be kept even for the most important places; for many of the records are likely to relate to very trifling housekeeping matters.

The interest of the National Park Service of the Interior Department in records on truly historical places is an important interest. Every scrap of information on such places may be important to Park Service historians and should, therefore, be preserved for them. In general, the observation of the German archivist Meissner in regard to records on buildings is valid; namely, that you should keep files relating to real property if they establish the rights of the state to such property or if they relate to the administration of property that is of special or historical interest.

Another class of records relating to manmade objects, of which numerous examples are found in the holdings of the National Archives, consists of records relating to ships. Very large series of such records exist, such as plans, including tracings, drawings, blueprints, and the like, of naval vessels among the records of the Navy Department, and of commercial vessels among the records of the Commerce Department. There are both antiquarian and scholarly interests in the early vessels constructed in this country that are reflected quite well in *The American Neptune*, a quarterly periodical devoted to various aspects of marine research. It is obvious from a perusal of its pages that records containing information on the design, construction, and operation of various types of vessels at different periods are of real interest to a large group of persons. But it is doubtful if the same research interest attaches to most records of new vessels as attaches to practically all records of old ones, and if, therefore, an archivist is justified in keeping more than a few selected classes of records on relatively new vessels.

Another type of record on manmade objects found in the National Archives is that relating to the granting of patents by the United States Government. This group of records illustrates why certain records have value for the information they contain on objects rather than because they reflect the administrative processes of government, though, of course, patent files may also serve to do the latter. The patent granted to Galileo by the Doge of Venice in 1594 for inventing "a machine for raising water and irrigating land," (Footnote 10) for example, throws interesting light on the patent system existing at that time as well as on the technological developments of the period. The monopolies and patents granted by the American Colonies before the establishment of the Federal Government shed light on the industrial life of the colonial period. The first patent granted in America for machinery pertained naturally to agricultural equipment. It was given by Massachusetts in 1646 to Joseph Jenks and related to a mill for making scythes and "diverse sorts of edge tools." (Footnote 11). Other rights of manufacturing during the colonial period pertain to making salt, potash, pitch, molasses, sperm candles, linseed oil, duck canvas, paper, and nails. The patents granted by Thomas Jefferson while Secretary of State include those to John Fitch for his invention of the steamboat and to Eli Whitney for his invention of the cotton gin; they also throw incidental light on Jefferson's part in establishing the patent system. The early patent files, with their applications and related plans, drawings, and sketches, are important for the information they contain on the patents themselves and for the information they contain on the technological development of the country.

But while the earlier patent "case" files have an undoubted research interest, this is less certain for the more recent ones. As the country has developed technologically, the patents relating to its industrial and mechanical processes and devices have progressively become more specialized. The recent files, particularly those since 1900, usually relate to small parts of highly complicated processes or machines and seldom to an entirely new mechanical device that has had, or may have, a major impact on the economic life of the country. Thus they are less significant individually than the older files. And the information they contain is also available, to a greater extent in recent years, in published documentary sources. The printed patents themselves contain most of the information that the Government is justified in keeping to show the development of technology, from a patent point of view. Only a very limited number of individual patent files relating to

the most significant technological developments appear to be worth preserving for the period after 1900.

Records Relating to Phenomena

The term "phenomena," it will be recalled, refers in the present context to what happens to either persons or things -- to conditions, activities, programs, events, episodes, and the like. The phenomena recorded in public records are of interest chiefly to social scientists, but some of them may be of interest to natural scientists. If the phenomena are old, they are of chief concern to the historian; if new, to the sociologist, the economist, or the student of government.

Since most records that come into the care of an archivist are relatively old, the interests of historical research are most important to him. An archivist, no matter what his training, will ordinarily appraise records primarily on the basis of their historical value or interest. This is the basis on which Armand Gaston Camus (1740-1804) and Pierre Claude François Daunou (1761-1840), the first heads of the *Archives Nationales*, appraised the prerevolutionary records of France.

Modern archivists are generally trained as historians, and it may therefore be assumed that they are competent to appraise the value of public records for historical research. Most archivists are likely to preserve all records that relate significantly to important personages, episodes, or events. No American archivist, for instance, would knowingly destroy anything of value relating to an episode like the Whisky Rebellion, an event like the Louisiana Purchase, or a personage like Abraham Lincoln. And if an archivist's knowledge of history is extensive, he is likely to preserve records relating to personages and episodes whose influence on the course of events, though less widely known, was considerable. Most archivists are likely to keep the basic source materials for studies in diplomatic, political, and military history, which were once the chief concern of historians. The National Archives, for example, keeps the official despatches, reports, and instructions of the State Department that are needed for a study of foreign affairs; the committee files, reports, and journals of the House and Senate needed for a study of political affairs; and the various series needed for a study of the conduct of war, produced by the War and Navy Departments. If a full picture is to be obtained of diplomatic, political, and military affairs, however, these basic sources must be supplemented by many other record series of a specialized nature. The series on diplomatic matters, for example, must be supplemented by records pertaining to economic matters, particularly records produced by Government agencies that are concerned with international trade, as well as by records pertaining to public opinion, such as press releases, broadcast scripts, and films and recordings.

The appraisal of records from the point of view of their historical interest becomes difficult when the records relate to broad historical movements, historical causation, and the like. Here a discriminating choice may have to be made among the records that are available. A movement like the westward expansion of the United States, for example, can be traced in a number of record groups in the National Archives, including those for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Bureau of Land Management, and various other Government bureaus.

When records relate to recent social or economic matters, a greater degree of specialized knowledge is required for their appraisal than is ordinarily possessed by historians. Here the knowledge of economists, sociologists, and scholars in other disciplines comes into play. Recent public records that are of interest to such scholars arise especially from the regulatory and social welfare activities of modern governments. They may be of real significance for studies of various aspects of modern society. They may be used, for example, to study the consequences of public welfare activities -- what happened to private economic organizations under Government regulation or the rural and urban patterns that are developing in the country, social trends, and the like.

As one goes backward in time information on social and economic matters becomes less complete. Records on business are almost as scanty for the 19th century as they are full for the 20th century; and almost all of them that are still extant for the earlier period should therefore be preserved. Generally public records relating to social and economic matters that are earlier than the First World War should be carefully compared with other documentary sources to determine if they contain unique information.

Present-day documentation of social and economic matters, however, is very voluminous. The publications of the Federal Government alone (which has in fact become the world's largest publisher) provide a wealth of information on such matters. On the economy of the country, in particular, an ever-increasing range and volume of information is available in published form. This relates, among other things, to the Nation's agricultural and industrial production, trade, consumption, unemployment, financial condition, prices, income, and living costs. Among the agencies of the Government that issue in print statistical data and information on economic conditions are the Bureau of the Census, the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Office of Business Economics, the Bureau of Agricultural

Economics, the United States Tariff Commission, the Federal Trade Commission, and the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System.

In appraising records on social and economic matters, the archivist must rigidly apply the test of uniqueness. In the National Archives and Records Service this test was recently applied to a large series of tax returns submitted by certain kinds of corporations to the Internal Revenue Service. (Footnote 12). The returns, comprising about 100,000 cubic feet for the period from 1909 to date, admittedly contain information which, if not to be found elsewhere, would be useful for certain kinds of research. The analysis showed, however, that substantially similar information was available elsewhere on many, though not on all the corporations submitting returns. The analyst concluded that commercially published sources, and other official sources, were better than the series in question for a study of the business economy generally, and also for a study of any important corporation particularly.

By and large, the scholar can usually rely on the overwhelming mass of published literature for information on recent day-to-day social and economic developments in this country. Published sources generally provide adequate information on them. The original public records on them are far too voluminous to be preserved *in extenso;* and it is mainly in regard to the abnormal or the unusual that an archivist should preserve such records. If he preserves records on normal contemporary social and economic matters at all, he should preserve them in summary form or in exemplary selection.

Several large record series are being preserved in the National Archives because they contain information on unusual or abnormal economic or social conditions. These are illustrated by the transcripts of hearings of the National Recovery Administration which reflect the condition of industry during the 1930 economic depression, and by the price and accounting records of the Office of Price Administration which reflect the condition of industry under the controlled economy of the Second World War.

The principle of special selection should be applied to more recent records on social and economic matters. This principle simply means that a few records are selected for preservation because they contain data that are representative or illustrative of the whole, because they deal with an important or significant event or action, or because they contain data that are considered adequate for a study of particular social or economic conditions. It is well to distinguish this principle at once from the principle of statistical sampling. The latter, which was developed early in the present century, requires a knowledge of method that is not ordinarily possessed by the archivist. The techniques of collecting, classifying, and analyzing statistics, of correlating data, computing averages and probabilities, making forecasts, plotting curves, and compiling index numbers are highly specialized techniques that are part of a distinct discipline. And statistical sampling techniques, even if known to the archivist, cannot ordinarily be applied to the selection of records.

The archivist preserves records for unknown uses; the statistician must know in advance the particular ways in which his samples are to be used. The archivist selects records that have characteristics illustrative of the whole; the statistician, in accordance with well-defined mathematical formulae, selects a sample that presents information of measurable reliability on particular characteristics of the universe from which it is taken. A statistical sample is more exact than the representative or illustrative body of records preserved by the archivist.

Criteria based on and closely resembling statistical methods were applied in selecting records on the rehabilitation loan program of the Farm Security Administration, an agricultural agency of the last economic depression in the United States. This procedure has been described by Dr. Carl J. Kulsrud in an article in *The American Archivist* for October 1947, entitled "Sampling Rural Rehabilitation Records." In granting rehabilitation loans to relief clients, the agency developed for each such client case files containing reports, correspondence, and other papers. These case files are rich in information on the social, economic, and human factors that led to the rehabilitation loan program. They are useful, therefore, for social studies, and studies of the economic conditions in the depression period as well as for a study and evaluation of the procedures, ideologies, and techniques followed in the program. Since the files were very voluminous, a sampling was made of them that saved only 3 percent of the total. The sample consisted of all case files for typical counties in 134 distinct farming areas as classified by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics of the Department of Agriculture.

The principle of special selection is illustrated more typically in the action taken by the National Archives in preserving various kinds of labor board case files. In selecting files of the National Labor Relations Board for retention, for example, the importance of the individual cases was established in reaction to the following standards (1) the issues involved in the case; (2) the influence of the case in the development of principles, precedents, or standards of judgment; (3) the contribution of the case to the development of methods and procedure; (4) the intensity of public interest in the case (5) the effect of the case on the national or local economy or on the industry and (6) the strikes, lockouts, etc., attendant upon the

case.

Records that contain concentrations of social and economic data which may be statistically exploited are similar in character to those that contain summaries of personal data. The schedules produced by censuses of industry and agriculture, outwardly at least, are similar to the population census schedules. Schedules of business and agricultural censuses, however, do not possess the same value as schedules of population censuses, mainly because the information they contain is almost always used in the aggregate and not in relation to individual business or agricultural units, and because the aggregates have been tabulated and enumerated satisfactorily.

In appraising records the contents of which can be statistically summarized, such as administrative forms and statistical questionnaires and schedules, the archivist is well-advised to proceed cautiously. If the Government agency that created the records for statistical purposes did not fully exploit them, it is hardly likely that anyone else will; for scholars outside the Government do not ordinarily have the resources for the costly exploitation of such records. If the records were not created for statistical purposes, it is hardly likely that they will yield accurate or meaningful statistics. During the Second World War (on January 7, 1944), a conference was held with a group of business and technical experts on the possible uses of the Office of Price Administration rationing applications for gasoline, tires, and automobiles. After exhaustive discussion, the experts agreed that the applications need not be saved for the purpose of compiling any national statistics from them. "The arguments used," according to Dr. W. J. Wilson, "would seem to have covered the major principles governing the evaluation of records for statistical purposes." (Footnote 13). They were:

1. Masses of raw statistical data need not be preserved after the statistical information has been satisfactorily extracted.

2. Masses of unusable data need not be retained longer than is necessary to determine their irremediably faulty character.

3. Masses of usable data will seldom be used at all if not used fairly promptly.

4. Masses of usable data should not be retained for indefinite periods of time on the mere chance that they may one day be employed.

5. All these considerations apply still more cogently to data assembled on applications, registrations, and other administrative forms than they do to data assembled on regular questionnaires.

Generally, then, the archival institution should preserve only summary information -- not the great mass of schedules and questionnaires on which the summaries are based.

While records of interest to the social scientist relate primarily to phenomena involving persons, those of interest to the natural scientist relate largely to phenomena involving material things.

Scientific records present special problems of evaluation to the archivist. These arise mainly with respect to records needed for further scientific research, not with respect to records pertaining to the history of scientific activities in the Federal Government, which are clearly suitable for archival preservation.

Scientific records may be in the form of raw data resulting from observing and measuring various phenomena or in the form of tabulations and summaries of such data. The archivist normally prefers to keep only tabulations and summaries. In the case of scientific investigations, however, the raw, or original, records may also have value; for much of the essential detail in such records may be lost in the course of their tabulation and summarization. Tabulations usually present only averages, and summarizations only the most important characteristics of each type of measurement.

The virtue of the raw original data depends on the nature of the phenomena that were observed and measured and on the degree to which the observations and measurements can be exploited by others than those that made them. An archivist is perhaps justified in keeping data that are derived from measurements of basic phenomena, such as those of the earth, the oceans, and the atmosphere. In the National Archives records containing observations of the earth are best exemplified by the reports of the Coast and Geodetic Survey, 1832-1942. These reports contain data derived from astronomical, magnetic, seismographic, gravity, and other kinds of observations. In many cases they constitute the only authentic source from which can be deduced natural or artificial changes in the physical condition of the area surveyed. Records containing observations of the oceans include the reports of various surveys made by the Hydrographic Office, as well as the logbooks collected by Matthew Fontaine Maury (1806-73) to compile his wind and ocean current charts. Records containing observations on the atmosphere are represented by the climatological and meteorological records received from

the Weather Bureau, which were returned by the National Archives to the Bureau after it had established proper facilities for their care and exploitation, though the National Archives retained a film copy of the records created before 1890.

In general, scientific records, just as any other type of records, should have values beyond the temporary ones that resulted in their production if they are to be preserved in an archival institution. This is usually not the case when raw scientific data relate to the measurements and observations made in controlled laboratory experiments, which can be repeated. Records of chemical and biological laboratory experiments are thus not likely to be worth keeping in an archival institution.

Scientific records in their raw form may also present difficulties to the archivist because of their form. They are usually quite voluminous. Often they have attributes that make their further use impracticable. They may be intelligible only to the persons who recorded the data. Like punchcards produced in statistical work, they may be in a form that is difficult to interpret without resort to mechanical or electronic devices.

They may be in the form of recordings made by instruments on tape or film or photographic plates, or charts, or cards. And these forms present special problems of storage as well as of use.

CONCLUSIONS

Several general observations may now be made regarding the appraisal of modern public records, to wit:

First, the considerations that should be borne in mind in ascertaining values in records cannot be reduced to exact standards. Our standards can be little more than general principles. They can never be made precise, though, of course, the series or types of records produced by a particular public agency that meet certain general standards may be precisely identified. The standards should never be regarded as absolute or final. At best they will serve merely as guidelines to steer the archivist through the treacherous shoals of appraisal.

Secondly, since appraisal standards cannot be made exact or precise, it follows that they need not be applied with absolute consistency. Archivists may use different criteria in evaluating records of different periods, for what is valuable for a past age may be valueless for the present. The American historian Justin H. Smith (1857-1930) observed that "a great deal is said by some people about 'rubbish,' but one investigator's 'rubbish' may be precious to another, and what appears valueless to-day may be found highly important tomorrow." (Footnote 14). Archivists of different archival institutions may also use different criteria in evaluating similar types of records, for what is valuable to one archival institution may be valueless to another. Complete consistency in judging informational values is as undesirable as it is impossible of accomplishment. Diverse judgments may result in records on particular matters being preserved at particular places, although the records arc not deserving of general preservation. Diverse judgments may also spread the burden of preserving the documentation of a country among its various archival institutions, making one preserve what another may discard. Certain Federal records may thus be more appropriately preserved in regional depositories than at the National Archives because the information they contain is in such detail that it can be preserved only in concentrated form at the national level or because the information they contain is predominantly of a local or regional rather than a national interest.

Thirdly, since appraisal standards cannot be made absolute or final, they should be applied with moderation and common sense. An archivist should keep neither too much nor too little. He should follow the Aristotelian precept of "moderation in everything, excess in nothing."

This precept, for that matter, is similar to two of Meissner's standards, which are "extremes are to be avoided," and that "too great an abstraction is an evil."

Fourthly, appraisals of records should not be based on intuition or arbitrary suppositions of value they should be based instead on thorough analyses of the documentation hearing on the matter to which the records pertain. Analysis is the essence of archival appraisal. While appraising the evidential values of records the archivist must take into account the entire documentation of the agency that produced them. He should not make his evaluations on a piecemeal basis or on the basis of individual organizational units within an agency. He should relate the particular group of records under consideration to other groups to understand its significance as evidence of organization and function. His appraisals, it is apparent, are dependable to the degree to which he has analyzed the origins and inter-relations of records. Similarly, while appraising the informational values of records, the archivist must take into account the entire documentation of society on

the matter to which the information relates. He must determine if the particular group of records under consideration contains unique information and if it has a form that makes it valuable as a source of information, and only after he has done this should he enter into the realm of the imponderable -- into questions of research importance. His appraisals of records, again, are dependable to the degree to which he has analyzed all other available documentary sources on the matter to which the records pertain.

Fifthly, if his analysis does not yield the information that is needed in the appraisal of records, the archivist should seek the help of experts. Obviously an archivist cannot be expected to know the research needs of all scholarly disciplines. Occasionally he will be called on to evaluate records that involve a knowledge beyond his sphere. In evaluating records needed for disciplines in which he is not trained he should, if necessary, seek the help of specialists in those disciplines. If the archival institution is a very large one, a number of subject-matter specialists are likely to be found on its staff whose special competencies can be brought to bear on the evaluation of special groups of modern public records. If the institution is small, the number of staff subject-matter specialists will be limited, and the need for outside help will be greater. In the National Archives a panel of experts was used to help evaluate the records of the General Accounting Office, an agency of the legislative branch of the Government that audits the fiscal operations of agencies of the executive branch. (Footnote 15). The records offered by this office spanned the years 1776-1900 and comprised over 65,000 cubic feet. They obviously had very little value for the evidence they contained of organization and function; but since they covered the whole of the national history of the United States, they were likely to contain incidental or accidental information on important historical, economic, and social phenomena. Appraisal of these records was an onerous task that could not very well be accomplished by any one person, no matter how comprehensive his knowledge of research resources and research needs might be. After the records were reviewed by various subject-matter specialists on the stall of the National Archives, therefore, help was obtained from specialists in the fields of military history, western history, and public administration.

Sixthly, before seeking the help of experts the archivist should do the basic analytical work that is preliminary to the appraisal of records. He should first accumulate the data about the records in question that are essential in determining the uniqueness and form of the information contained in them. He should describe the various series to be appraised, indicating their form and volume, the types of information available in them, their relation to other groups or series that contain similar information, their relation to published sources, and the like, in order that the scholars consulted may more quickly get at the business of determining which particular series or groups contain information valuable for investigations of various matters and which contain this information in the most usable and condensed form.

Seventhly, while exploring the interest of scholars in particular groups of records, the archivist should assume the role of moderator. An archivist dealing with modern records realizes that not all of them can be preserved, that some of them have to be destroyed, and that, in fact, a discriminating destruction of a portion of them is a service to scholarship. He is therefore inclined to agree with the observation that "too great an abstraction" in the appraisal of records "is an evil," for he knows that any scholar with a little intellectual ingenuity can find a plausible justification for keeping almost every record that was ever produced. In evaluating certain of the large series of records that are useful for social and economic studies, therefore, he must take into account the practical difficulties in the way of their preservation and bring these to the attention of the scholars who are interested in preserving them. He must show that a careful selection of the documentation produced by a modern government is necessary if he is not to glut his stacks with insignificant materials that will literally submerge those that are valuable. He must call attention to the fact that a government has only a limited amount of funds for the preservation of its documentary resources and that these funds must be applied judiciously for the preservation of the most important of these resources.

Footnotes

Footnote 1 - Great Britain. Public Record Office, *Principles governing the Elimination of Ephemeral or Unimportant Documents in Public or Private Archives* (London, n.d.), p. 1. Return to Document Text

Footnote 2 - Great Britain. P.R.O., *Guide to the Public Records, Introductory* (London, 1949), pt. 1, p. 6. See also Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Administration*, p. 11 (2d ed., London, 1937). Return to Document Text

Footnote 3 - The analysis of German appraisal standards is based on Wolfgang Leesch (ed.), Adolf Brenneke, *Archivkunde: ein Beitrag zur Theorie und Geschichte des europaischen Archivwesens*, p. 38-43 (Leipzig, 1953). Return to Document Text

Footnote 4 - Great Britain. P.R.O., *Principles governing the Elimination . . .*, p. 1-2. Return to Document Text

Footnote 5 - Paul Hasluck, "Problems of Research on Contemporary Official Records," *Historical Studies: Australia and New Zealand*, vol.5, No. 17, p. 5 (Nov.1951). Return to Document Text

Footnote 6 - C. E. W. Bean, "Australia's Federal Archives," *ibid.*, vol. 3, No. 11, p. 183 (Nov. 1947). Return to Document Text

Footnote 7 - Leesch-Brenneke, *Archivkunde*, p.40. Return to Document Text

Footnote 8 - National Office of Vital Statistics, *Vital Statistics in the United States, 1950,* 1:2-12 (Washington, 1954). Return to Document Text

Footnote 9 - Article on the "Torrens System," *Encyclopedia Americana,* 26:708-709 (New York, Chicago, 1936). Return to Document Text

Footnote 10 - P. J. Frederico, "Origin and Early History of Patents," *Journal of the Patent Office Society,* 11:294 (July 1929). Return to Document Text

Footnote 11 - P. J. Frederico, "Colonial Monopolies and Patents," *ibid.*, 11:360 (Aug. 1929). Return to Document Text

Footnote 12 - Wallace B. Goebel. "Corporation Tax Returns," memorandum to Director, Records Management Division, Mar. 28, 1956 (MS. in National Archives). Return to Document Text

Footnote 13 - W. J. Wilson, "Analysis of Government Records: An Emerging Profession," *Library Quarterly*, 16:14 (Jan. 1946). Return to Document Text

Footnote 14 - "Proceedings of the Second Annual Conference of Archivists," American Historical Association, *Annual Report,* 1910, p. 312. Return to Document Text

Footnote 15 - Lyle J. Holverstott, "The General Accounting Office Accession: Its History and Significance," *National Archives Accessions*, No. 52 (Feb. 1956), p. 1-11. Return to Document Text

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